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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Sub-Commission on Prevention of
Discrimination and Protection
of Minorities
Forty-sixth session
Agenda item 18

PROTECTION OF MINORITIES

Letter dated 5 August 1994 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the Chairman of the Commission on Human Rights

Please find enclosed the statement of the President of the Russian Federation, Mr. B.N. Yeltsin, of 31 July 1994. We would be grateful if this document could be circulated as an official document of the forty-sixth session of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities under agenda item 18.

(Signed): V.V. Lochtchinine
Deputy to Permanent Representative

GE.94-13466 (E)

STATEMENT BY MR. B.N. YELTSIN,
PRESIDENT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

The situation in Latvia is again attracting world attention in connection with the renewed confirmation by the Latvian Saeime of the discriminatory law on citizenship. The passage of the law was a serious trial for Latvia's still developing statehood, a test of the country's professed commitment to European and world humanitarian and democratic values.

The definitive text of the law leads one to the conclusion that the Latvian Parliament failed that test: its members failed to rise above their own ambitions and disregarded the growing concern in the international community at Latvia's dangerous drift towards militant nationalism. In effect they ignored a substantial proportion of the recommendations by CSCE, the Council of Europe and the European Union. Latvia has not set about bringing its policies into line with European and world human rights standards but has chosen instead to divide its inhabitants into first- and second-class people, legalizing discrimination on ethnic grounds. As a result, we in Europe on the verge of the twenty-first century are becoming witnesses to the transformation of a newly independent State into a bed of national intolerance raised to the status of official policy. It is not difficult to imagine the consequences of such a course for Latvian society and the stability of the Baltic region.

By its actions the Republic of Latvia is annulling the positive contribution achieved at great effort by the parties in settling all aspects of the withdrawal of Russian troops from the country.

Russia cannot be reconciled to a situation whereby hundreds of thousands of ethnic Russians in a neighbouring country are placed in an effectively demeaning position. We maintain that they are entitled to stay in the States where they were born or have been living for years. And it is those States that are responsible for ensuring our fellow-countrymen's civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

Russia will construct its policy towards Latvia and plan practical steps in the light of the existing situation.

The Government of the Russian Federation has been instructed to devise practical approaches to cooperation with Latvia in trade, economic and other areas.

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been ordered to alert international organizations and our leading partners to this flagrant example of disregard for international human rights standards.

As the President of the Russian Federation, I hereby declare that the Federation will afford all-round support to its fellow-countrymen living abroad, and I confirm our State's readiness to grant unimpeded Russian citizenship, in accordance with Russian legislation, to any of our fellow-countrymen who so wish, and to defend and afford protection to all ethnic Russians in Latvia or anywhere else outside Russia.

B. Yeltsin

31 July 1994

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PROTECTION OF MINORITIES

Note verbale dated 5 August 1994 from the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Latvia to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the Centre for Human Rights

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Latvia to the United Nations Office in Geneva presents its compliments to your good offices and has the honour and the task to request the secretariat of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities to circulate under item 18 as an official document of the forty-sixth session of the Sub-Commission, the statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia of 4 August 1994.

Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia

The Republic of Latvia Ministry of Foreign Affairs expresses its bafflement concerning the 4 August statement by the President of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin, regarding Latvia's Citizenship Law.

In his statement, Boris Yeltsin accuses Latvia's Parliament as if it had ignored the objections and recommendations of Western Governments and international organizations. In the statement, Mr. Yeltsin characterizes Latvia as a "centre of national intolerance", as though Latvia officially practised discrimination against its inhabitants on the bases of ethnicity. The Citizenship Law of the Republic of Latvia is characterized in this statement as a "glaring example of the ignorance of international human rights standards".

With regret, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs must state that the assertions expressed in the Russian Federation President's statement do not reflect the truth. Many authoritative international organizations, especially the CSCE and the Council of Europe, have been in consultation with Latvia's Parliament during the process leading up to the adoption of this law. The recommendations of these and other organizations were included in the adopted law, thereby insuring that the said law meets international standards. In its 29 July 1994 declaration, the European Union welcomed the adoption of a citizenship law in Latvia and rates it as "a good basis for progress in the integration of ethnic minorities and the development of inter-community relations ...". The Union welcomed the fact that "the law takes account of the recommendations of CSCE and the Council of Europe and of appeals from the Union".

Also incomprehensible is the assertion that Latvia has "negated the positive result that was achieved thanks to the monumental efforts of both sides, to regulate all facets of the Russian troop withdrawal issue". Exactly the opposite is true - to date Latvia's side has done everything it could to reinforce this positive result.

The aforementioned statement shows an inadequate understanding by Russia of the positions of the CSCE and the Council of Europe, as well as of the work of Latvia's Parliament. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs expresses its regret that the Russian Federation has not based its rating of this law on the internationally accepted principles, by which the CSCE, the Council of Europe and the European Union operate.